

This compact book contains considerable wisdom presented in a readable and friendly style. It lacks dogma and encourages the reader to obtain a clear perspective of the current state of the art of treating drug users. The book presents sensible treatment objectives and harm reduction strategies, and I hope it will play an important role in helping medical students and practitioners achieve a more realistic, humane and flexible approach to treating drug abusers.

JUDITH GREENWOOD

Community psychiatrist, Community Drug Problem Service, Royal Edinburgh Hospital

RELAPSE AND ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOUR

Michael Gossop (ed)

Routledge, London (1989)

305 pages. Price £29.95

The immense amount of information about relapse gathered together in this book will be of most use to those working in the field of addiction.

Relapse is not clearly defined. It could be used to describe any recurrent dysfunctional behaviour. If this is indeed the central problem of addiction then any such behaviour can be classed as addictive. The book therefore includes chapters on eating disorders and on sex offenders.

It does not seem to me that much enlightenment has so far come out of this widening of the concept of addiction nor out of the struggle to understand relapse and it was brave of the editor to include a chapter from a contributor who shares that view.

I do not wish to be over critical. That people are struggling so hard to deepen their understanding of these problems is encouraging. The problems are heart-breaking — for the individuals, for those around them and for those who try to help them. It is good news that for those drug addicts who enter treatment the outcome is better than we thought. We need to understand why some succeed and what gave them the strength to change.

P.M. HIGGINS

Retired professor of general practice, Guys Hospital Medical School, London

HEALTH CARE FOR SINGLE HOMELESS PEOPLE

Sandra Williams and Isobel Allen

Policy Studies Institute, London (1989)

366 pages. Price £19.95

When a well-meaning but rather idiosyncratic nurse was prevented from dispensing medicines to single homeless men, public attention was briefly drawn to the health of this most disadvantaged group. Questions were asked in parliament, and the

government was mildly embarrassed at how little it was shown to be doing. The result was hasty action to set up two schemes providing a special service to the homeless, using salaried general practitioners under a little known provision of the health service acts. The evaluation of these projects forms the basis of this book.

The result is disappointing. To attempt to evaluate in scientific terms what was in essence an *ad hoc* political exercise is almost inevitably doomed to failure. Perhaps the most valuable lesson is in the limitations of 'objective' science. The two projects differed in both the situations which existed before they started and the way in which events unfolded during the project. Thus any attempt to evaluate them, other than a careful and perceptive description of what took place is at best unhelpful and at worst misleading. With such unique social experiments an anthropological or historical method would have been more appropriate and more honest.

The reader interested in the health care of the homeless should therefore beware of placing too much reliance on this report. A shining exception to this warning is the literature review at the end, which, in contrast to the rest of the book, is both scholarly and comprehensive. So long as one views what precedes it with scepticism, this chapter alone would make the volume worth purchasing.

PETER D. TOON

Lecturer, Department of General Practice and Primary Care, St Bartholomews and the London Medical Colleges

MARTINDALE: THE EXTRA PHARMACOPOEIA (29th edition)

The Pharmaceutical Press, London (1989)

1930 pages. Price £95.00

Martindale is a publishing *tour de force*. It is a massive tome containing monographs on all the drugs and topical medications which you could wish to prescribe, describing the formulation of the drug as well as its pharmacology. *Martindale* is to be found on the bookshelves of all pharmacies but should it also be in practice libraries? Most general practitioners rely on the *British national formulary* to provide them with information about the drugs they prescribe, but excellent though the *Formulary* is, it is necessarily concise. When an unusual or exotic problem in clinical therapeutics and dispensing arises general practitioners need textbooks on therapeutics and also *Martindale*.

In the future *Martindale* may be available as an electronic data base making it more accessible and easier to update. Whatever the format its content will continue to be of value to general practitioners and pharmacists.

GRAHAM BUCKLEY

General practitioner, Livingston, West Lothian

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